Solvents Fact Sheet

Sniffing solvents is inhaling the fumes from household products which contain solvents. Solvents include glues, nail varnish and nail varnish remover, aerosol sprays, cigarette lighter fuel and petrol. These substances all have very strong smells.

If solvents are sniffed they go into the lungs where it goes into the blood and through the blood gets taken to the brain. Because the gases from the solvent get into the lungs and blood it cuts down the amount of oxygen that is taken into the body.

The first effects are similar to being drunk:

* ‘high’
* giggly and forgetful
* dizzy and confused
* blurred vision and slurred speech
* sometimes nauseous (feel sick)

Solvents lower the heart and breathing rate. Solvents affect the way the brain works and the user may take more risks, as they are not thinking clearly. They can have accidents like drowning, road accidents, falling accidents, choking and suffocating on vomit.

Long-term effects include damage to the liver, kidneys and brain.

Death from solvents can be sudden and happen the first time a person uses it. Every week at least one young person dies from sniffing solvents.

The Law: It is not illegal to sniff solvents, but it is illegal for shopkeepers to sell any refill containing butane gas (this includes cigarette lighter refills) to young people under 18 years.